**Doron Krakow:** Idon't view my place here as being all that extraordinary: I'm just another grandfather looking after his grandchild while his son is off at war.

**Mishy Harman (narration:)** Heט listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, during these incredibly difficult days we're trying to bring you voices we're hearing among and around us. These aren't stories, they're just quick conversations, or postcards really, that try to capture slivers of life right now.

This war is a humbling experience for us all. People, no matter who they are or what they normally do are just trying to pitch in wherever they can. So we've seen ex-generals jump into their private cars and go save civilians from the carnage of October 7th . We've seen former ministers and senior politicians volunteer to pick cherry tomatoes on farms near Gaza. And we've seen rockstars jam for a single soldier on an army base. Likewise, Doron Krakow, the President and CEO of the JCC Association of North America, who in normal times runs an organization that employs tens of thousands of professionals, immediately got on a plane and came to Israel in order to do one thing: be a grandpa. Our senior producer, Yochai Maital, spoke to him.

**Doron Krakow:** My name is Doron Krakow. In my professional life I'm the president and CEO of JCC Association of North America; and on the personal side I'm the proud father of three sons, including a 26-year- old who is a *tzanhan* (paratrooper) in *miluim* (reserves), and the father of my first grandchild—who was born on the 23rd of August.

**Yochai Maital:** Mazel Tov. And usually you live in the States?

**Doron Krakow:** My wife and I live in Tenafly, New Jersey. And, as I mentioned, I became a grandfather for the first time here in Israel in August. So my wife and I came here on the 14th of August, in anticipation of the arrival of this baby. We stayed through the *Brit Mila* (circumcision), and then decided to stay through the *chagim* (holidays), so that they would have some extra hands during those complicated first few weeks. And believe it or not we returned to the US on Friday, the sixth of October.

**Yochai Maital:** Wow.

**Doron Krakow:** Yeah, crazy. We walked into our house at 6:30 in the evening, had dinner, managed to stay awake for another couple of hours. And then I fell asleep as usual after a long trip. I woke up at 2:30 in the morning, local time, and the war had begun. And this is such a small country, and our network here is so large, it was obvious that we would know people who had been affected; we would know people who had been killed; that we would know people potentially who had been taken once it became clear that people had been dragged back to the dungeons of Gaza.

I was in touch with my son, of course. And by 11 o'clock in the morning on that terrible day, he had gotten his tsav shemone (draft notice): he had been recalled to active duty. And I immediately booked a return flight to Israel. He and I came to an understanding, which was: as long as it was necessary for him to give 100% of his focus to the job in front of him, I would make sure to give 100% of mine to looking after his family. And our deal is that that's what I'll do until he comes home.

**Yochai Maital:** Bottles, diapers…

**Doron Krakow:** All that good stuff. And the truth of the matter is these are *brachot* (blessings)...these are blessings for me: to hold him, and to soothe him, and to feed him, and to change him. That stuff is a joy. And I never anticipated I would have so much day-to-day quality time. And I think that's happening in every household or every other apartment in the country. So there's something very unextraordinary about it, very routine.

**Yochai Maital:** How is he doing? How's Aaron, your son's name is Aaron? How is he doing?

**Doron Krakow:** Doing okay…Aaron is a very dedicated *miluimnik*, dedicated reservist. We're just at the end of his having had several days of leave, so I dropped him off back with his unit very close to Otef Aza, very close to the Gaza envelope, early this afternoon. And now again we'll wait with, you know, with knots in our stomach and a lump in our throat for news about what's happening next. Yesterday, Aaron and I and several other guys that he had been in basic training with made the drive to Peki’in for the funeral and burial of Jamal Abbas, who was Aaron's basic training commander, and with whom he served in Hevron, who was an influential person in Aaron's life, was a guest at the wedding—and lost his life in the way so many of the brave commanders have in the course of this and other wars. He was, you know, in the vanguard when they were hit. And we lived the tragedy with a Druze community…of mourning and then burying an Israeli hero.

**Yochai Maital:** Wow. And I want to transition you a little bit here to talk about your professional role.

**Doron Krakow:** Very happily.

**Yochai Maital:** Tell me a little bit about what your job is.

**Doron Krakow:** So first of all, the JCC Association of North America is the community of Jewish community centers, there are 172 JCCs, across Canada and the United States. Between them they welcome 1.5 million people through their doors, in person, each week. A million of those each week are Jews, and Jews of every age, background, and disposition: from infancy to old age; from ultra orthodox to completely secular; left, right and center politically; and all the letters of the identity alphabet. It is the only Jewish place to which the entire diverse cross section of Jewish life predictably appears week after week after week throughout the year. That makes the JCCs the largest platform for engagement of the North American Jewish community that there is. And at the same time, half a million of our friends and neighbors from beyond the Jewish community also come to the JCC each week throughout the year to do something that they might just as easily do somewhere else, but that they prefer to do with us because of the quality, because of the environment, because of the way we make them feel when they come. But it is the single most significant place in which the wider community encounters the Jewish community in a Jewish setting. So we serve the dual purpose of being the Jewish communities’ town square, and the embassy of the Jewish community to the wider geography we serve.

**Yochai Maital:** Yeah, you know I'm talking to you from New York. It's kind of funny, we've reversed positions here. So an Israeli from New York is interviewing an American who is in Jerusalem at the moment.

And I can say as an Israeli that I was absolutely overwhelmed by the reaction of the community here, and how powerful it was…and in coming out in support and solidarity with Israel. I didn't, and I still don't take it for granted. And I admit that it surprised me because the common wisdom was that the Jewish community in North America was growing apart from Israel, and even trying to actively distance itself from Israel. And then suddenly, you know, the events of October 7th occurred, and you just felt this like deep emotional connection.

So I wanted to just take this opportunity to maybe ask you…what is it about the Jewish community in North America that Israelis don't understand?

**Doron Krakow:** Look, the response from the North American Jewish community was not entirely surprising to me because when the chips are down we have a very strong sense of responsiveness and reaction. And I think in this instance it's been coupled by the fact that North American Jews are finding themselves under some duress. In other words, the assault was not simply the horrific massacre of innocent Israelis on the seventh of October, but the reaction of the wider world which was not simply dismissive of Israel's need to pursue Hamas, and to eliminate their ability to wage that kind of brutal assault on Israeli civilians in the future, but in so many places it was coupled with a celebration of the Hamas freedom fighters themselves. And not only were those demonstrations and those voices in so many settings in American and Canadian and Western society supportive of Hamas, but they began to turn their vitriol on Jews in general and not simply on whatever their concerns are geopolitically about Israel.

*[News coverage of pro-Palestinian rally in New York]*

So I think there was a recognition that we are all in our own way in the crosshairs of this kind of hatred and antisemitism. And that served as a bit of a wake up call. And I think it has rallied people who had faded but not disappeared. Also creating a significant opportunity for us to renew that kind of engagement with the Jewish community and the strengthening of their sense of Jewish literacy and understanding of Israel and what's happened here.

In some respects, Yochai, I think there's an odd parallel. I told you earlier that I flew home on the sixth of October where the running themes of life in Israel was that Israeli society was on the edge of the abyss, that democracy was tearing itself apart, that politics and judicial reform and all of these issues had opened these deep fractures in Israeli society. And there's some question as to what the future of Israel would be. But on the seventh of October, the bywords maybe of the State of Israel, *kochanyu b’achdutaynu*, our strength comes from our unity, because faced with a larger external threat, lots of other things were placed into perspective.

And so I think for the North American Jewish community, there is an element of that. And look, I think that at all times, our strength as a Jewish community and as a Jewish people comes from the recognition that the things we share in common are far more important than the things over which we disagree. And we discover in particularly difficult times that the significance of that is amplified a great deal. So while I think these first weeks after the nightmare of October 7th has seen us rally in all parts of the Jewish world…will be tested as time goes by with the knowledge that the war is likely to be a protracted one. And the images of the war as we move further and further away from the seventh of October are images that will reflect less well when it comes to what the critics are interested in talking about. Secondly, I think it's highly unlikely that the world that we thought we were living in Jewishly on the sixth of October is coming back. And now that the challenge of antisemitism has been released in the way that it is, it's highly unlikely that it's going to go away anytime soon. So we are facing a new chapter in the organized Jewish world as we look to the future.

That's a chapter that's going to require more of us, and will have us feeling far less confident and secure than we felt in a long time. But out of the darkness comes the glimmer of light: that we have an opportunity to become better than what we've been. That's the mission.

**Yochai Maital:** Now I want to thank you so much Doron for everything you do for the Jewish community in general, but more specifically for what you're doing for your son. As a father of three I can tell you that good grandparents are not something to be taken for granted. And I know it's hard work.

**Doron Krakow:** It's hard work. But look, what a *zechut* (privilege), what a privilege for me to have a chance to lend a hand with my family. And I think attributing to my father, my late father David, after whom my grandson was named: you do whatever you have to do to be part of helping our people through the most difficult hours. And you think about that in personal terms, and you think about that in communal terms, and you think about that in peoplehood terms. So to me it's a great honor to be here. It's a great honor to have the responsibility to lead the JCC movement at a time where I think it has the potential to be far more than what it's been. But it's a bumpy road.

**Yochai Maital:** Yeah. All right. Thank you so much Doron. *Kol tuv* (all the best.)

**Doron Krakow:** *Yofi* (great). Bye, bye.